NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-5572 MARCH 2, 1978
MATTHEW SCHNEIDER/LOS ANGELES

NO PICTURES, PLEASE

ANNCR:

CONCERN HERE IN THE UNITED STATES OVER POLICE SURVEILLANCE OF PRIVATE CITIZENS ISN'T LIMITED TO THE PRACTICES OF SUCH NATIONAL AGENCIES AS THE F.B.I. AND THE C.I.A. LAST TUESDAY, IN LOS ANGELES, A TEAM OF CITY POLICE PHOTOGRAPHERS WERE THROWN OUT OF THE CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER FOR TAKING PICTURES OF A PUBLIC HEARING. MATTHEW SCHNEIDER HAS DETAILS IN THIS BACKGROUND REPORT.

VOICE:

THE WELL-ATTENDED CITY COUNCIL HEARING HAD BEEN UNDERWAY FOR SOME TIME WHEN FOUR LOS ANGELES POLICE DEPARTMENT PHOTOGRAPHERS WERE ORDERED OUT OF THE CHAMBER. THE POLICE SAID THEY HAD RECEIVED A REPORT THAT THERE MIGHT BE AN UNLAWFUL DISTURBANCE AT THE HEARING AND THAT THE PHOTOGRAPHERS WERE SENT TO GATHER PHOTOGRAPHIC EVIDENCE SHOULD SOMETHING HAPPEN. NOTHING DID, AN D SEVERAL PEOPLE CHARGED THAT THE POLICE PHOTOGRAPHERS WERE REALLY THERE TO TAKE PICTURES OF CITIZENS WHO TESTIFIED AGAINST A CONTROVERSIAL PLAN TO BUILD A LARGE NUCLEAR POWER GENERATING PLANT IN THE DESERT 360 KILOMETERS EAST OF LOS ANGELES.

(OPT) WORKERS OF THE PROPOSED SUNDESERT NUCLEAR FACILITY ARGUE THAT IT MUST BE BUILT TO FILL A NEED FOR ADDITIONAL POWER FOR LOS ANGELES AND OTHER SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA COMMUNITIES THROUGH THE 1980S. OPPONENTS, INCLUDING GOVERNOR EDMUND "JERRY" BROWN, OPPOSES ALL NUCLEAR POWERPLANT CONSTRUCTION IN EARTHQUAKE-PRONE CALIFORNIA ON THE GROUNDS THAT THE PLANTS POSE UNACCEPTABLE DANGERS. (END OPT)

MOST CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS EXPRESSED SURPRISE AT THE POLICE ACTIVITY TUESDAY NIGHT -- SOME WERE OUTRAGED. ONE COUNCILMAN, A LONGTIME CRITIC OF POLICE INTELLIGENCE-GATHERING PRACTICES, SAID THAT APPARENTLY ALL THE PUBLICITY ABOUT CONGRESSIONAL CONCERN OVER EXCESSIVE SURVEILLANCE BY FEDERAL AGENCIES SUCH AS THE F.B.I. HAD NOT YET REACHED THE MUNICIPAL LEVEL. SEVERAL COUNCIL MEMBERS WONDERED WHETHER THE PRESENCE OF POLICE PHOTOGRAPHERS AT A PUBLIC HEARING WOULD INTIMIDATE CITIZENS WHO WERE MERELY EXERCISING THEIR CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS. EDITOR BILL THOMAS OF THE LOS ANGELES TIMES, WHICH HAS CRITICIZED POLICE SURVEILLANCE METHODS IN THE PAST, SAYS "PEOPLE SHOULD BE ABLE TO APPEAR IN PUBLIC WITHOUT FEAT THAT THEIR PICTURES WILL END UP IN POLICE INTELLIGENCE FILES.

THE POLICE PHOTOGRAPHERS WHO ENTERED THE CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER TUESDAY NIGHT WERE WEARING CIVILIAN CLOTHING AND THEY WERE SITTING IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER'S PRESS GALLERY. THAT PROMPTED FURTHER CONCERN FROM MR. THOMAS AND OTHER LOS ANGELES JOURNALISTS, WHO GENERALLY AGREE THAT THERE ARE FEW IF ANY INSTANCES WHEN POLICE SHOULD POSE AS JOURNALISTS.

THE POLICE MAINTAIN THAT IT IS AN ACCEPTABLE INVESTIGATIVE PRACTICE TO TAKE PICTURES OF PEOPLE WHO ARE ENGAGING IN ILLEGAL ACTS. BUT A POLICE DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN CHARACTERIZED TUESDAY'S INCIDENT AS A MISUNDERSTANDING THAT RESULTED FROM A SERIES OF ERRORS IN JUDGMENT. ONE HIGH-RANKING POLICE OFFICIAL SAID HE DOUBTS THAT THE INCIDENT WILL EVER BE REPEATED.

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